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"MARPESSA"

"Roaming with morning thoughts amid the dew"

MARPESSA

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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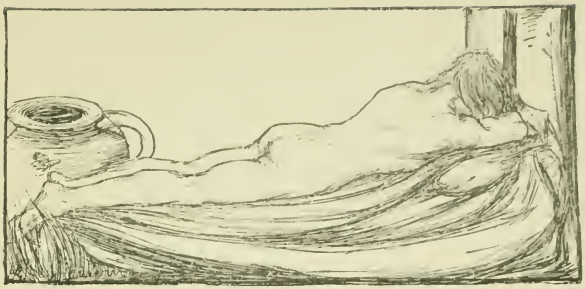


"MARPESSA"

Marpessa, being given by Zeus her choice between the god Apollo and Idas a mortal, chose Idas.

WOUNDED with beauty in the summer night
Young Idas tossed upon his couch, and cried
"Marpessa, O Marpessa!" From the dark
The floating smell of flowers invisible,
The mystic yearning of the garden wet,
The moonless-passing night—into his brain

Wandered, until he rose and outward leaned
In the dim summer: 'twas the moment deep
When we are conscious of the secret dawn,
Amid the darkness that we feel is green.
To Idas had Marpessa been revealed,
Roaming with morning thoughts amid the dew,
All fresh from sleeping; and upon her cheek
The bloom of pure repose; like perfect fruit
Even at the moment was her beauty ripe.
The god Apollo from the heaven of heavens
Her mortal sweetness through the air allured;
And on this very noon she shall decide

"MARPESSA"

'Twixt Idas and the god, take to herself
A brief or an eternal lover. So
When the long day that glideth without cloud,
The summer day, was at her blue deep hour
Of lilies musical with busy bliss,
When very light trembled as with excess,
And heat was frail, and every bush and flower
Was drooping in the glory overcome;
They three together met; on the one side,
Fresh from diffusing light on all the world,
Apollo; on the other without sleep
Idas, and in the midst Marpessa stood.

"MARPESSA"

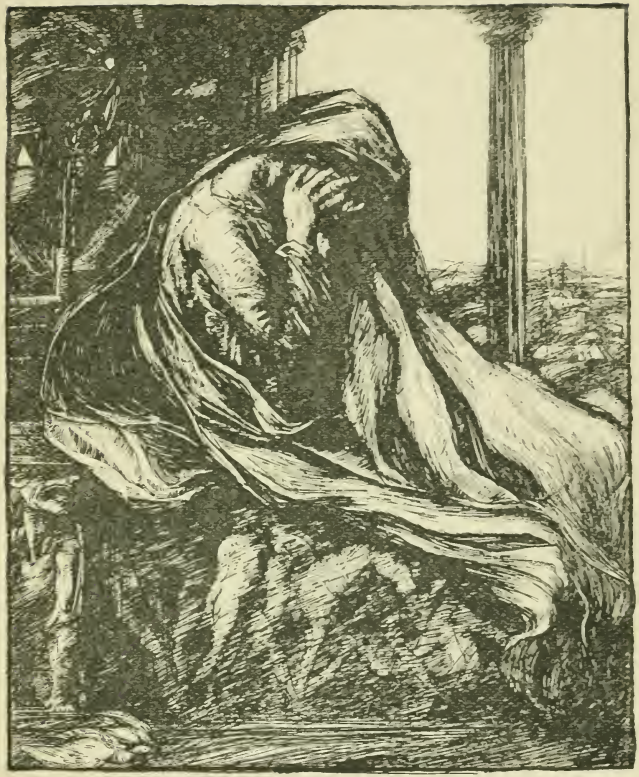
Just as a flower after drenching rain,
So from the falling of felicity
Her human beauty glowed, and it was new;
The bee too near her bosom drowsed and
dropped.
But as the god sprang to embrace her, they
Heard thunder, and a little afterward
The far Paternal voice, "Let her decide."
And as a flame blown backward by a gust,
Burned to and fro in fury beautiful
The murmuring god; but at the last he spoke,
And smiled as on his favourite western isle.

"MARPESSA"

"Marpessa, though no trouble, nor any pain,
So is it willed, can touch me; but I live
For ever in a deep deliberate bliss,
A spirit sliding through tranquillity;
Yet when I saw thee I imagined woe,
That thou who art so fair, shouldst ever taste
Of the earth-sorrow: for thy life has been
The history of a flower in the air,
Liable but to breezes and to time,
As rich and purposeless as is the rose:
Thy simple doom is to be beautiful.

"MARPESSA"

Thee God created but to grow, not strive,
And not to suffer, merely to be sweet,
The favourite of his rains; and thou indeed
Lately upon the summer wast disclosed.
Child, wilt thou taste of grief? On thee the hours
Shall feed, and bring thy soul into the dusk:
Even now thy face is hasting to the dark!
For slowly shalt thou cool to all things great,
And wisely smile at love; and thou shalt see
Beautiful Faith surrendering to Time,
The fierce ingratitude of children loved,
Ah, sting of stings! A mourner shalt thou stand



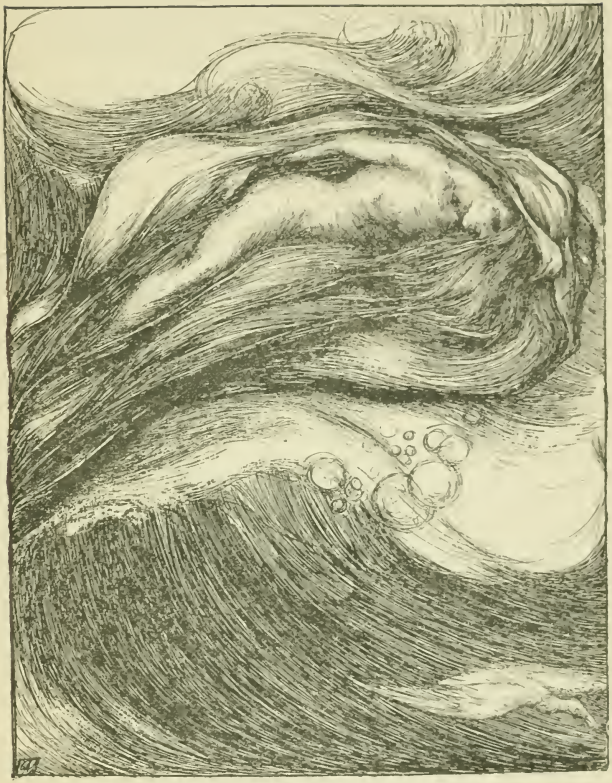
"The fierce ingratitude of children loved"

At Passion's funeral in decent garb.
The greenly silent and cool-growing night
Shall be the time when most thou art awake,
With dreary eyes of all illusion cured,
Beside that stranger that thy husband is.
But if thou'lt live with me, then shalt thou bide
In mere felicity above the world,
In peace alive and moving, where to stir
Is ecstacy, and thrilling is repose.
What is the love of men that women seek it?
In its beginning pale with cruelty,
But having sipped of beauty, negligent,

And full of languor and distaste: for they
Seeking that perfect face beyond the world
Approach in vision earthly semblances,
And touch, and at the shadows flee away.
Then wilt thou die? Part with eternal thoughts,
Lie without any hope beneath the grass,
All thy imaginations in the dust?
And all that tint and melody and breath,
Which in their lovely unison are thou,
To be dispersed upon the whirling sands!
Thy soul blown seaward on nocturnal blast!
O brief and breathing creature, wilt thou cease

Once having been? Thy doom doth make
thee rich,
And the low grave doth make thee exquisite.
But if thou'lt live with me, then will I kiss
Warm immortality into thy lips;
And I will carry thee above the world,
To share my ecstacy of flinging beams,
And scattering without intermission joy.
And thou shalt know that first leap of the sea
Toward me; the grateful upward look of earth,
Emerging roseate from her bath of dew,—
We two in heaven dancing,—Babylon

Shall flash and murmur, and cry from under us,
And Nineveh catch fire, and at our feet
Be hurled with her inhabitants, and all
Adoring Asia kindle and hugely bloom;—
We two in heaven running,—continents
Shall lighten, ocean unto ocean flash,
And rapidly laugh till all this world is warm.
Or since thou art a woman, thou shalt have
More tender tasks; to steal upon the sea,
A long expected bliss to tossing men.
Or build upon the evening sky some wished
And glorious metropolis of cloud.



"More tender tasks; to steal upon the sea"

Thou shalt persuade the harvest and bring on
The deeper green; or silently attend
The fiery funeral of foliage old,
Connive with Time serene and the good hours.
Or,—for I know thy heart,—a dearer toil,—
To lure into the air a face long sick,
To gild the brow that from its dead looks up,
To shine on the unforgiven of this world;
With slow sweet surgery restore the brain,
And to dispel shadows and shadowy fear."
When he had spoken, humbly Idas said:
"After such argument what can I plead?

Or what pale promise make? Yet since it is
In women to pity rather than to aspire,
A little I will speak. I love thee then
Not only for thy body packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose sweet in the night of life;
Nor for that stirring bosom all besieged
By drowsing lovers, or thy perilous hair;
Nor for that face that might indeed provoke
Invasion of old cities; no, nor all
Thy freshness stealing on me like strange sleep.

"MARPESSA"

Not for this only do I love thee, but
Because Infinity upon thee broods;
And thou art full of whispers and of shadows.
Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearnéd up the cliffs to tell;
Thou art what all the winds have uttered not,
What the still night suggesteth to the heart.
Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,
Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea;
Thy face remembered is from other worlds,
It has been died for, though I know not when,
It has been sung of, though I know not where.

It has the strangeness of the luring West,
And of sad sea-horizons; beside thee
I am aware of other times and lands,
Of birth far-back, of lives in many stars.
O beauty lone and like a candle clear
In this dark country of the world! Thou art
My woe, my early light, my music dying."
As he was speaking, she with lips apart
Breathed, and with dimmer eyes leaned through
the air
As one in dream, and now his human hand
Took in her own; and to Apollo spoke:

"MARPESSA"

"O gradual rose of the dim universe!
Whose warmth steals through the grave unto
the dead,
Soul of the early sky, the priest of bloom!
Who beautifully goest in the West,
Attracting as to an eternal home
The yearning soul. Male of the female earth!
O eager bridegroom springing in this world
As in thy bed prepared! Fain would I know
Yon heavenly wafting through the heaven wide,
And the large view of the subjected seas,
And famous cities, and the various toil

Of men: all Asia at my feet spread out
In indolent magnificence of bloom!
Africa in her matted hair obscured,
And India in meditation plunged!
Then the delight of flinging the sunbeams,
Diffusing silent bliss; and yet more sweet,—
To cherish fruit on the warm wall; to raise
Out of the tomb to glory the pale wheat,
Serene ascension by the rain prepared;
To work with the benignly falling hours,
And beautiful slow Time. But dearest this
To gild the face that from its dead looks up,

"MARPESSA"

To shine on the rejected, and arrive
To women that remember in the night;
Or mend with sweetest surgery the mind.
And yet, forgive me if I can but speak
Most human words. Of immortality
Thou singest: thou wouldst hold me from the ground,
And this just opening beauty from the grave.
As yet I have known no sorrow; all my days
Like perfect lilies under water stir,
And God has sheltered me from his own wind;
The darling of his breezes have I been.

Yet as to one inland, that dreameth lone,
Sea-faring men with their sea-weary eyes,
Round the inn-fire tell of some foreign land;
So agéd men, much tossed about in life,
Have told me of that country, Sorrow far.
How many goodly ships at anchor lie
Within her ports; even to me indeed
Hath a sea-rumour through the night been
borne.
And I myself remember, and have heard,
Of men that did believe, women that loved,
That were unhappy long and now are dead,

"MARPESSA"

With wounds that no eternity can close,
Life had so marked them: or of others who
Panted toward their end, and fell on death
Even as sobbing runners breast the tape.
And most I remember of all human things
My mother; often as a child I pressed
My face against her cheek, and felt her tears;
Even as she smiled on me, her eyes would fill,
Until my own grew ignorantly wet;
And I in silence wondered at sorrow.
When I remember this, how shall I know
That I myself may not, by sorrow taught,

"MARPESSA"

Accept the perfect stillness of the ground?
Where, though I lie still, and stir not at all,
Yet shall I irresistibly be kind,
Helplessly sweet, a wandering garden bliss.
My ashes shall console and make for peace;
This mind that injured, be an aimless balm.
Or if there be some other world, with no
Bloom, neither rippling sound, nor early smell,
Nor leaves, nor pleasant exchange of human
speech;
Only a dreadful pacing to and fro
Of spirits meditating on the sun;

"MARPESSA"

A land of baréd boughs and grieving wind;
Yet would I not forego the doom, the place,
Whither my poets and my heroes went
Before me; warriors that with deeds forlorn
Saddened my youth, yet made it great to live;
Lonely antagonists of Destiny,
That went down scornful before many spears,
Who soon as we are born, are straight our friends;
And live in simple music, country songs,
And mournful ballads by the winter fire.
Since they have died; their death is ever mine;

I would not lose it. Then, thou speak'st of joy,
Of immortality without one sigh,
Existence without tears for evermore.
Thou wouldst preserve me from the anguish, lest
This holy face into the dark return.
Yet I being human, human sorrow miss.
The half of music, I have heard men say,
Is to have grieved; when comes the lonely wail
Over the mind; old men have told it me
Subdued after long life by simple sounds.
The mourner is the favourite of the moon,

And the departing sun his glory owes
To the eternal thoughts of creatures brief,
Who think the thing that they shall never see.
Since we must die, how bright the starry track!
How wonderful in a bereavéd ear
The Northern wind; how strange the summer
night,
The exhaling earth to those who vainly love.
Out of our sadness have we made this world
So beautiful; the sea sighs in our brain,
And in our heart that yearning of the moon.
To all this sorrow was I born, and since

"MARPESSA"

Out of a human womb I came, I am
Not eager to forego it; I would scorn
To elude the heaviness and take the joy,
For pain came with the sap, pangs with the bloom:
This is the sting, the wonder. Yet should I
Linger beside thee in felicity,
Sliding with open eyes through liquid bliss
For ever; still I must grow old. Ah, I
Should ail beside thee, Apollo, and should note
With eyes that would not be, but yet are dim,
Ever so slight a change from day to day

"MARPESSA"

In thee my husband; watch thee nudge thyself
To little offices that once were sweet:
Slow where thou once wert swift, remembering
To kiss those lips which once thou couldst not leave.
I should expect thee by the Western bay,
Faded, not sure of thee, with desperate smiles,
And pitiful devices of my dress
Or fashion of my hair: thou wouldst grow kind;
Most bitter to a woman that was loved.
I must ensnare thee to my arms, and touch
Thy pity, to but hold thee to my heart.

But if I live with Idas, then we two
On the low earth shall prosper hand in hand
In odours of the open field, and live
In peaceful noises of the farm, and watch
The pastoral fields burned by the setting sun.
And he shall give me passionate children, not
Some radiant god that will despise me quite,
But clambering limbs and little hearts that err.
And I shall sleep beside him in the night,
And fearful from some dream shall touch his hand
Secure; or at some festival we two

"And he shall give me passionate children"

Will wander through the lighted city streets;
And in the crowd I'll take his arm and feel
Him closer for the press. So shall we live.
And though the first sweet sting of love be past,
The sweet that almost venom is; though youth,
With tender and extravagant delight,
The first and secret kiss by twilight hedge,
The insane farewell repeated o'er and o'er,
Pass off; there shall succeed a faithful peace;
Beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind,
Durable from the daily dust of life.
And though with sadder, still with kinder eyes,

We shall behold all frailties, we shall haste
To pardon, and with mellowing minds to bless.
Then though we must grow old, we shall grow
old
Together, and he shall not greatly miss
My bloom faded, and waning light of eyes,
Too deeply gazed in ever to seem dim;
Nor shall we murmur at, nor much regret
The years that gently bend us to the ground,
And gradually incline our face; that we
Leisurely stooping, and with each slow step,
May curiously inspect our lasting home.

"He looking downward, and she gazing up"

But we shall sit with luminous holy smiles,
Endeared by many griefs, by many a jest,
And custom sweet of living side by side;
And full of memories not unkindly glance
Upon each other. Last, we shall descend
Into the natural ground—not without tears—
One must go first, ah god! one must go first;
After so long one blow for both were good;
Still like old friends, glad to have met, and leave
Behind a wholesome memory on the earth.
And thou, beautiful god, in that far time,
When in thy setting sweet thou gazest down

On this grey head, wilt thou remember then
That once I pleased thee, that I once was
young?"
When she had spoken, Idas with one cry
Held her, and there was silence; while the god
In anger disappeared. Then slowly they,
He looking downward, and she gazing up,
Into the evening green wandered away.

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